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ABSTRACT

Research indicates that the quality of teacher-student communication and interaction has a significant impact on student achievement. Areas in which effective communication strategies can be used include teaching methods, classroom management, and the emotional climate of the classroom. The most effective teaching method is "direct teaching" in which the teacher-student interaction is structured and academically focused. In direct teaching, the teacher informs the student of the goal, guides the student in recall of previous learning, interacts in a question-response-feedback pattern, and provides activities which enable mastery. In classroom management, communication strategies for the teacher which contribute to achievement include emphasizing an academic focus, making objectives clear, and directing activities. An effective emotional climate is established when the students' self-concepts are good, when they are provided with tasks which have a high probability of success, and when an orderly classroom is maintained. The final section of this document lists resource materials which can be helpful in implementing these strategies. (DC)

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COMMUNICATION TRAINING TO
IMPROVE TEACHING

An Educational Problem/Strategy Booklet

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INTRODUCTION

Every day educators encounter school problems they want to improve. Findings of research and results of development can sometimes help educators formulate a successful attack upon the problem. But before educators can use R&D outcomes, they must first become aware of them. This booklet is designed to provide educators with R&D outcome information that helps them plan strategies that solve problems.

The booklet begins with the reporting of a typical school problem in basic skills. Specific questions to be addressed by the subsequent paragraphs are then asked. Next, strategies, based upon research results which may be used to solve the problem are discussed. The description of each strategy is given so that educators can determine which approach will be most beneficial in improving their particular problem in their particular school situation.

After a school faculty considers strategies and determines which may be appropriate to pursue, they may wish to investigate the availability of validated* educational products which incorporate the strategy. Appropriate educational products may be implemented in the school as a part of the solution to the problem. Therefore, descriptions of educational products that promote the successful strategies have been collected. You may obtain the descriptions of the products by checking and returning the send-back form found on the last page of this booklet, or by contacting:

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*Products are validated by undergoing extensive field-testing in classrooms and by comparing the improvements with pre-existing programs.

COMMUNICATION TRAINING TO IMPROVE TEACHING

PROBLEM:

Our teachers have indicated a need for improving their communication skills. They say that by learning better communication strategies, they will increase their effectiveness as teachers and this will result in increased student achievement. My task is to develop training that meets their needs.

QUESTIONS:

1. Is this idea supported by research? Does the learning of communication skills result in increased student achievement?
2. The term "communication skills" covers a wide area. What kind of "communication skills" are effective?
3. Are there any materials that can help me plan a communication training program to improve teaching?

WHAT RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT INCREASING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND TEACHER COMMUNICATION.

Research is providing startlingly consistent information about some teacher behaviors that contribute to the academic success of their students. Results can be generalized as follows:

- Teachers are primary contributors to a child's learning. What a teacher chooses to do in the classroom does make a difference in the child's achievement.
- Teachers who increase the amount of time their students spend actively engaged in learning increase their students' achievement.
- More time spent in direct interaction between teacher and student about the instructional content (rather than independent work, discipline or personal communication, or transition time) results in increased achievement.

- Teachers who organize the lessons so that students (1) are aware of the goals for instruction and (2) can accomplish the task with a high degree of success have students who achieve more.
- Teachers who make sure to inform students about their performances improve student achievement. To inform students requires more than telling the student the work is right or wrong. The teacher must provide some clues that will help the student keep doing what is right and avoid doing what is wrong.
- Teachers who avoid belittling students and who maintain a warm, democratic but structured classroom contribute to their students' achievement.
- Teachers who use appropriate questioning strategies foster student achievement. Students differ from one another; there are a number of types of objectives, and teachers must adjust their questioning strategies to match the objective and the student.

The importance of teacher communication is apparent in each of these findings. However, there is no clearcut answer provided by research to your question on the impact of a staff development program in communication skills for increasing achievement.

WHAT ARE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS?

The term "communication skills" includes non-verbal as well as verbal communication, direct and indirect, one-way, two-way, or multiple-linked communication. Rather than attempting a definition of communication, the approach taken in this report will be to use the research to derive types of effective teacher communication.

1. Teacher Communication and the Teaching Act.

For teachers, *the act of teaching* is the actual time they spend interacting with students to reach learning goals. The time spent calling roll, recording grades, passing out books, lining up for lunch, etc. is not considered a part of the teaching act. Research agrees with the teachers' view of teaching, and shows that the time spent in interaction between students and teachers on academic content is productive for student learning.

Effective teachers spend more minutes interacting in an instructional mode with their students than teachers who are less effective. Consequently, effective teachers spend less time during transition from one activity to another (putting away books, changing seats, etc.), less time managing behavior problems, and less time in independent seat work (Berliner, 1979; Berliner & Rosenshine, 1977, Emmerson, 1979).

The students in classrooms of effective teachers spend more minutes engaged in academic learning than do students in the less-effective teachers' classrooms, and time-on-task is directly related to achievement. Therefore, the teacher's use of classroom minutes is critical.

The communication style used by effective teachers has been given the name "direct teaching." In direct teaching, the focus is upon academic goals, and the teacher-student interaction is structured. ("Structured" means organized, directed, and interactive; structured is not synonymous with authoritarian.)

The structure of interaction for direct teaching follows:

A Step to Get Ready: The teacher allocates enough time to complete the lesson. Most effective programs report that 15-20 minutes daily of direct teaching time for one objective is sufficient, but of course, the time needed depends upon the objective.

The teacher has planned the lesson and arranged the materials so there is little transition time, etc. The selected lesson is appropriate to the students' abilities.

Step 1: The teacher makes sure the goals of the instruction are clear to the student. Even young children tend toward goal-oriented, self-organizing behavior. Knowing the goal helps them use their learning strategies more effectively (Berliner & Rosenshine, 1977; Gagné & Briggs, 1974).

Step 2: The teacher guides the students in recalling important information that helps organize the materials or reviews the pre-requisite skills that will be used by the student to complete the assigned task (Gagné & Briggs, 1974).

Linguists studying the communication act note the necessity in communication of providing the listener or reader with given information before reporting

new information. Haviland and Clark (1974) have proposed that even sentences are staged so that the subject contains given information and the predicate contains the new information. It can be reasoned that this Given-New staging accounts for passive sentences. Humans are slower to understand passive sentences when they read them as single sentences, but not when, in text, the subject of a passive sentence repeats information given in a previous sentence.

Haviland and Clark (1974) call the placement of known information before new a contract between the speaker/writer and the listener/reader. The listener/reader expects that the speaker/writer will conform to the Given-New Contract and present the old information first so that the listener/reader can use the old information to guide the understanding of the new message by accurately linking the new information to old information.

Step 3: The teacher presents new information or skills and interacts with the students in a factual question-student response-teacher feedback pattern (Rosenshine, 1979). The following paragraphs examine in-depth the terms "factual questions," "student responses," and "teacher feedback patterns."

Factual Questions v.s. Expressive Questions. Factual questions are those for which there is a single answer. All students must learn the convergent answer. Basic skills objectives are typically learned by mastering convergent responses, so it is not surprising that the frequency of factual questions is positively related to gains in achievement.

Expressive questions are those which require the student to express an opinion or to create a divergent response. It has been typical for factual questions to be called "low-order" and for expressive questions to be called "higher-order." Teachers are often exhorted to use higher-order questioning. However the research shows that achievement is positively related to factual questioning, and that lower socio-economic students are especially helped by factual questioning (Berliner & Rosenshine, 1977; Medley, 1977).

This research evidence suggests that we need to re-examine our assumptions about questioning. First of all, the notion of "higher" or "lower" order needs to be analyzed. The term "higher" is associated with better, but it is not necessarily the case that questions requiring divergent responses are either higher or better. The terms arose during the initial applications of an information processing paradigm to human thinking. Creating a new response uses more "internal processing" time, and it was initially thought that the complexity of processing would define a hierarchical sequence of thinking. However, as more was learned about the internal processing, the idea of a hierarchy was abandoned. It was learned that any new learning or responding takes more processing time; it doesn't matter whether the response is convergent or divergent. The speed depends more upon how many of the prerequisites are well-learned. Of course, as a person practices the new learning, the time needed gets shorter and shorter. It is possible to learn complex responses to automaticity, while new "simple" responses may take lots of "thinking time."

This new view of the internal processes of thinking has given educators a different view of learning. Rather than disparaging automatic responses as low order learning, researchers have learned the value of them. Without previously learned responses, man couldn't think. The limited human processing capacity would become quickly overloaded. It is easy for a teacher involved in helping students learn a response to automaticity to feel that task is of low order because the excitement associated with the initial discovery of learning is not present. To counter this feeling, teachers should be made aware of the importance of such learning for future proficiency.

Student Response. Student response refers to an overt, observable behavior the student produces as a result of the teacher's question. The teacher can expect a single student or a group to respond. A number of validated educational programs in basic skills use rapid, group responding as the mode of student responding. All students respond to the teacher's questions. The pace of questioning and responding is faster than a typical class's tempo.

In this way the student's attention is kept on the task, and the response is practiced more times during the allotted minutes. In these programs, teachers learn techniques for cueing student responses, for patterning a question-response-feedback session, and for dealing with students who are unresponsive.

Teacher feedback. Effective teachers provide informative feedback, rather than merely providing positive or negative feedback. In giving informative feedback, the teacher tells the students how they missed the mark, or provides the students with clues that lead to the correct response. Negative feedback occurs when a teacher reports "bad job" "wrong," or some other similar expression following the students' response. The student learns it is wrong, but has no clue as to how a correct response can be produced. Positive feedback occurs when the student is told "good job" or given a "happy face." Again, the student knows the given response was correct, but has no clue as to why it was praised. Providing informative feedback guides learning and results in increased achievement (Rosenshine, 1979; Soar & Soar, 1979).

Step 4: The teacher provides activities which enable mastery of the objective. The teacher's role in this step is to choose appropriate activities and to monitor the students' on-task behavior. Researchers have reported that in more successful classrooms, teachers were quick to note students who were not doing their work and to remind them of the task at hand.

Research has also indicated that elementary students achieve more and stay at the task better if the activities are chosen by the teacher rather than by the student (Berliner & Rosenshine, 1977; Rosenshine, 1979; Soar and Soar, 1973).

Classroom practice is facilitated by a quiet, orderly environment. Elementary students also show increased achievement if they are able to do a high percentage of the tasks chosen for them. Success seems to breed a desire for the next task in which, the student predicts, there will be more success. If students must frequently ask for more instruction, then the task is probably too hard for them (Schneider, 1979).

Another research finding indicates that time spent in explaining procedure (how to do a paper or activity) is negatively related to achievement. If a set amount of classtime

is allotted to learning an objective, then devising activities that require lengthy explanations on how to do the task steals from the time available for learning (Berliner, 1979).

In summary, research has found that the teachers' communication with students during classtime is a critical factor in student achievement. Increases in student achievement are directly related to a complex of variables called direct teaching, time-on-task, and high success performance. Direct teaching occurs when

- 1) the teacher informs the student of the goal;
- 2) the teacher guides the student in the recall of previous learning;
- 3) the teacher interacts with the student in a factual questions-student response-teacher feedback pattern;
- 4) the teacher provides activities which enable mastery and monitors on-task behavior.

Teachers tend to define teaching as an act of communication in which pupil and teacher interact so that students learn content. If teachers know the techniques of direct teaching, then they can make the teacher-pupil interaction more productive.

2. Teacher Communication and Classroom Management.

The teaching act can be facilitated by the total classroom environment. The teaching act depends upon teacher attention and pupil attention. In classrooms where a distracting environment prevails, the teaching act is threatened. Therefore, the way a teacher manages the classroom becomes important to student achievement.

Classroom management is very much a result of teacher communication. By every word and deed, the teacher signals what behavior is acceptable and what activities are important. Research comparing classrooms where more learning occurs with those where less occurs have found several teacher communication strategies which contribute to student achievement:

Academic Focus. Teachers who maintain a strong, academic focus tend to have students who achieve. If the teacher believes learning basic skills is important, this is realized

in more time spent on learning activities, and more naturally occurring positive reinforcement for student achievement. Brophy and Evertson (1974) report in their study that successful teachers were determined that their students would learn. When teachers concentrated more on the personal level of students and did not express concern about academic matters, student achievement was lower.

Academic focus is often wrongly associated with a cold, impersonal atmosphere and a competitive, driving teacher personality. Research shows that this combination is not prevalent in the classrooms. Researchers have often found warmth and academic focus existing in the same classroom. The teaching act is essentially honest and humane, and interactions between student and teacher on academic content can be vital and warm as those focusing on non-academic topics. Reporting on a ethnographic study, Rosenshine (1979) observed that higher achieving classrooms tended to be convivial, cooperative, warm and democratic. Teachers in lower-achieving classrooms tended to do more belittling and shaming of students and more often resorted to the use of sarcasm. However, teachers who focus on affective outcomes alone, ignoring academic learning, tend to have the lower achieving classrooms. The highest achieving classrooms had teachers who were high in academic focus and moderate in warmth (Berliner & Rosenshine, 1977).

Clarity of Objectives. Part of the communicating academic focus is making sure the students are clear about the lesson's objectives. Berliner & Rosenshine (1977) report a study which showed that many children simply did not understand what was expected of them. Teachers rarely stated the objectives, so students had no clue about the goals. Structuring the lessons by clarifying the goal was a characteristic of the effective teachers in the study.

Directing Activities. An orderly classroom provides a better learning environment, one in which students and teachers can attend to academic content. Effective teachers use communication strategies to generate an orderly classroom. Studies have shown that effective teachers tend to spend the first weeks of the academic year getting their students ready to learn. These teachers used the first weeks for testing, getting to know the individual students, and letting the students learn about the teacher's expectations. They didn't try any elaborate grouping or innovative activities. They did establish routines for lining up, for turning in papers, for handling materials, etc. By the end

of this initiation period (one to two weeks) the class was sure of the expected behavior. For the rest of the year, these effective teachers spent less time in transition from one class to another, and in classroom discipline.

Effective teachers did maintain consistency in their expectations. Any infraction brought immediate attention. These teachers were not punitive, however. They seemed more to remind the students of the expected behavior than to threaten or deride (Emmerson, 1979; Clark, 1979).

Teachers of classrooms who achieved more arranged the classroom so students stayed on task. The students stayed at their task longer because they were not distracted by students freely wandering about the room or by frequent socializations. While teachers monitored the pupil's behavior, the orderly atmosphere required that less time be spent in reminding students to do their work (Soar & Soar, 1979). The research supports that teachers play a major role in structuring classroom behavior and that direct leadership from the teacher in organizing the environment results in greater achievement.

3. Teacher Communication and the Emotional Climate in the Classroom.

Self-Concept. Successful classrooms are characterized by students who feel good about themselves and their school activities. Teacher communication styles can contribute to the emotional climate of the classroom. In an evaluation of nine Follow Through programs, (Becker & Engelman, 1977), self-esteem of students was measured as well as achievement. The results showed that students in the program with the highest gains in achievement also had the highest scores in self-esteem. (The highest academic scores and self-esteem were obtained using the Direct Teaching Model).

Sometimes educators have thought that improving the student's self-concept should precede the learning of basic skills, but the findings from the Follow-Through program comparisons imply that self-concept is a spin-off of school success. Students felt good because they could do the task expected of them and could see their progress.

High Success Task. The Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study (BTES) reports that providing elementary school students with tasks that have a high probability of success increases achievement, retention over summer months, and a more positive attitude toward school. At the primary level, 75% of the task should fall in the medium and high success range. As the students get older, the mix

should include more and more demanding tasks, especially for the higher achievers. The idea that instruction should provide children with challenge is based upon an adult view of learning. Perhaps the greatest contribution to education from research of the past decades is that children are not small adults. They learn and function in childlike ways, not as adults. And instruction and classroom organization must conform to their needs (Schneider, 1979).

Orderly Classrooms. Previous studies have indicated that an open-classroom teaching style was preferred (Peterson, 1979). Open-classroom teaching is a style of teaching involving flexibility of space, student choice of activity, richness of learning materials, integration of curriculum areas, and more individual or small group instruction. However, more recent studies show that students achieve more when their movement is limited and when the teacher directs learning activities. *How should this apparent conflict in research be interpreted?* The conflict is partially due to the research design. Earlier studies failed to separate the variables of management style and emotional climate, and as a result tended to define classrooms as either democratic or authoritarian. More recent studies show that classrooms with a positive emotional tone may either be tightly organized and teacher directed or may have little organization or task direction. The negative classroom is characterized as one in which the teacher uses negative affect and criticism of pupils to "run a tight ship," and this style is detrimental to student achievement. However, the opposite use of positive affect alone shows no relationship to classroom success in the Soar and Soar studies (1979). Direct instructional style and a warm democratic climate are not truly in conflict. For example, the classrooms that showed high achievement were also described as convivial, cooperative, democratic and warm as well as maintaining an academic focus (Rosenshine, 1979).

Establishing a warm emotional climate in a classroom contributes to learning; the procedures for establishing such a climate seem to coexist with the teaching act. Success in learning and positive attitudes are highly correlated. Old stereotypes about what produces a warm climate and student achievement must be rethought in light of present research findings. Academic success contributes to the positive affect of the classroom. A teacher who aims at establishing warmth alone will fall short of the mark.

In summary, we see that teacher communication skills are vital in the success of the teaching act. Teachers can learn

to use direct teaching techniques when the learning objectives deal with convergent outcomes. Other styles of teaching may promote the learning of other types of objectives. The ability of the teacher to communicate and establish a classroom where the teaching act can take place is an important factor in student achievement. An orderly classroom provides an environment with few distractions to interrupt students learning. Orderly classrooms where the focus is on academics can be warm, democratic places. Students achieve more under conditions where the two factors coexist. They learn little where the atmosphere is warm, but there is no academic focus or where there is predominately negative affect in pupil-teacher interactions.

WHAT MATERIALS CAN HELP IN PLANNING TEACHER COMMUNICATION TO IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT?

Teacher communication may be improved by a staff development program which has these goals:

1. Improving teacher understanding of the relationship between student achievement, classroom climate, self-esteem, and teacher behavior,
2. Improving teacher skills in structuring and performing the teaching act, and
3. Improving teacher management of classroom activities.

There are materials which may help in planning a staff development program. Very few of the reported materials are validated and revised according to the field-testing.

1) *Materials to improve teacher understanding of the relationship between student achievement, classroom climate, self-esteem, and teacher behavior.* Teachers, like all of us, form models of the world and conform their behavior to the model. New experiences and new findings from research require that the old models be reworked. Therefore, it is important for teachers to learn about the relationship between student achievement, classroom climate, self-esteem and teacher behavior. Unfortunately, I know of no prepared materials.

Copies of the references used to prepare this paper can be obtained by requesting them from:

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2) *Materials to improve teacher skills in structuring the teaching act.* A number of validated programs which employ direct teaching as a strategy have teacher training programs. These programs are listed in the Booklet: BASIC SKILLS PROGRAMS FEATURING DIRECT TEACHING. To receive a copy call FREE, phone: (904) 487-1078, Suncom: 277-1078, or send the request form (Page 15) to:

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The National Education Association (NEA) surveyed and annotated other teacher training materials. To receive information on those materials dealing with the teaching act, please request:

NEA - TECHNIQUES FOR IMPROVING THE TEACHING ACT

from FREE by using the request form or calling.

3) *Materials to improve teacher management of classroom activities.* The NEA survey and annotation of staff development materials was used to collect a list of products concerning teacher management of the classroom. Please request:

NEA - TECHNIQUES FOR CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

by using the send-back form or by calling FREE.

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COMMUNICATION TRAINING
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